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Carter Given Oaths on 'Leaks'

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Leaks to the press from high government officials last year so infuriated Jimmy Carter that the secretary of state, the director of the CIA and the president's national security adviser felt obligated to sign affidavits saying they were not the leakers. The Washington Post has learned.

Carter's wrath stemmed from a Washington Post account last October that described an internal administration split over whether to provide new types of military equipment to Morocco.

Signing sworn statements that they had not leaked the story were former secretary of state Cyrus R. Vance, CIA Director Stansfield Turner, national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Deputy Secretary of Defense W. Graham Clayton, Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and Undersecretary of State David Newsom, along with dozens of other high-ranking aides. All were interrogated by the FBI.

There were conflicting accounts as to whether Carter ordered his chief aides to sign the affidavits or whether they signed them voluntarily to mollify the president and encourage the other officials to sign them as well.

Either way, the taking of sworn statements from such high-level officials is unprecedented in any presidency, according to State and Defense department sources. Carter's vigorous pursuit of this and other leaks is an attempt to silence internal critics of his foreign affairs policies while demonstrating his grave concern over both the criticism and the substance of the leaks, sources said.

The investigation of the nine-month-old leak is still continuing. It is being handled by a special FBI team and is one of at least nine inquiries over the past 18 months into leaks describing deep policy divisions within the administration.

Two of the leak probes were initiated by the president.

The FBI has complained to the Justice Department about such investigations, departmental sources indicate, because agents do not believe such investigations ever lead to prosecutions. Instead, they are used to silence critics either by intimidating them or by identifying and firing them, the agents feel.

From the investigators' point of view, the White House is at fault for first encouraging the image of an open administration and then complaining bitterly as information about policy alternatives leaked out.

No sources of leaks have been yet identified by the two investigations initiated by the president. The Post was told. However, at least three State Department officials,

including one deputy assistant secretary of state, have been forced to resign after leak probes, sources said.

The White House refused to comment yesterday on the leak investigations.

The October story in The Post detailed the positions taken by each of the departments at a Cabinet-level Policy Review Committee (PRC) meeting two days earlier, on Oct. 16. The meeting had been attended by Vance, Brzezinski, Turner, Clayton, Christopher and Newsom as well as several of their aides.

Written by William Branigin, the article described a split over whether to provide new types of military equipment to Moroccan King Hassan II in his battle against guerrillas attempting to gain control of the Western Sahara. Several days later the president decided to provide the new arms.

One source said that "the president went off the ceiling" when he saw the article.

"Please see I get the results of the PRC before The Washington Post," the president reportedly said to Brzezinski. Although the minutes of the meeting had been prepared and were awaiting his approval, the president had not yet seen them, said one source familiar with the investigation.

"He got so mad that they [Brzezinski, Vance, and Turner] decided they had to do something they had never done before," said one source who said he felt PRC members came up with the idea of the affidavits to mollify the president.

Several other administration officials said, however, that the sworn affidavits were the president's idea.

"It was not so much the substance of the story," said one State Department source. "It was the detail about the conversations that took place in the meeting that got to the president. They were of greater concern than the substance. The story itself was trivial."

Other administration sources insisted that the president has been most disturbed by leaks that show in which direction he is leaning on foreign policy decisions, particularly when he takes a position perceived as being in conflict with a previously stated policy. Most such situations have involved placing ostensible national security concerns and strategic interests over articulated commitments to human rights and arms sales limits.

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